

March 4, 2013

Ms. Davita Vance-Cooks  
Acting Public Printer of the United States  
United States Government Printing Office  
723 North Capitol Street, N. W.  
Washington, D. C. 20401-0001

Dear Ms. Vance-Cooks:

We support the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA) conclusion that "free access to government information is both an important tenet of a democracy and a critical responsibility." We do not believe that NAPA's recommendation # 4, which calls for the Government Printing Office (GPO) to consider charging fees for end users of the Federal Digital System (FDsys), will foster democracy or the right of all in America to access the information produced with their tax dollars.

The NAPA report "Rebooting the Government Printing Office: Keeping America Informed in the Digital Age" recognizes the importance of the Federal Depository Library Program in providing access to traditional and electronic formats. But its suggestion that free access be limited to that provided through the depository libraries does not recognize that access to FDsys makes it possible for all libraries to provide access.

The report's assertion that the attempt to collect fees for access to GPO Access (Now FDsys) failed because the "technologies of online payments" were inadequate does not recognize that the Public Printer and the Joint Committee on Printing agreed that providing free access to everyone was the best way to promote democracy and fulfill the mandate of Congress to keep the public informed about its government. Charging for information and providing the same information for free is not a practical and workable business model.

Charging non-depository library users would impede technical innovation and the re-use and re-purposing of government information. It would contradict the policy of providing bulk government information for re-use. It would repudiate open government initiatives such as doc.house.gov, federalregister.gov, data.gov, and consumer.data.gov.

We do support NAPA's recommendation that the government should implement a government-wide strategy for managing the life cycle of digital government information; that GPO should offer to government agencies cost-recovery services for the life cycle management of information, including preservation; and that GPO should develop a strategic plan for the Federal Depository Library Program that will give libraries the flexibility and tools they need to provide free permanent public access to government information in the digital age (P. 3).

GPO should return to the model of sharing responsibility for preservation and access with Federal Depository Libraries. This would allow GPO to charge government agencies for information and content management services without having to impose fees on the public for use of that information. It would also release GPO from the burden of being solely responsible for the preservation of and access to government information. We urge that the 200 year old partnership between GPO and the libraries continue into the digital future.

Thank you for considering our concerns.

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